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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000099

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY AT A CROSSROADS ON SOUTHEAST,  
DEMOCRATIZATION

REF: A. ANKARA 64  
[1](#)B. ANKARA 31

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Classified By: PolCouns Janice G Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat (please protect), ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) vice chair, political veteran and ethnic Kurd, believes President Gul and PM Erdogan's recent White House meetings created an opportunity for progress on Turkey's Kurdish issue. It is now up to the government to take such courageous steps as broadening application of the existing amnesty provision and freeing up Kurdish language broadcasting. He sees Turkey as a society in transformation from one ruled top-down by the Ataturkist elite to a more democratic, more conservative, less dogmatic place. Firat recognizes that such change, fueled by rural-to-urban migration and upward mobility -- frightens the old elite. While he affirms the need for PM Erdogan's government to take bold steps, Firat seems overly concerned that the public could easily turn against AKP. A government swept into office by such a strong electoral mandate should be adept at shaping public opinion rather than feeling buffeted by it. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (C) PM Erdogan's and President Gul's recent Oval Office meetings, and the resulting enhanced intelligence sharing, put bilateral relationship in a much better place, Firat told us in a January 15 meeting. The impact on public opinion has been positive as well. It can be a turning point if the Turkish government - "MY GOVERNMENT," he emphasized - can summon the courage to take the civilian initiatives needed to further blunt the terrorist PKK and address the Kurdish problem.

[1](#)3. (C) Such initiatives should include opening up television and radio broadcasting, Firat stated. Since anyone can buy a satellite dish and pull in stations such as pro-PKK Roj TV, why not free up broadcasting? "We should be doing our own propaganda." Economic opportunities in the southeast should also be further expanded; the GOT must complete

implementation of the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP), which can also reap substantial employment and production dividends.

14. (C) At the same time, it is imperative to bring young people down from the mountains. Most who joined the PKK were enticed by ideology and propaganda. They did not sign up to an organized criminal gang and need an honorable way out. Informing on their former fellow militants, as required under the current amnesty provision (Turkish Penal Code Article 221), is not the answer. The GOT must be courageous on this issue, which has parliamentary, military and public opinion aspects. The risk, he noted, is that it remains easy for people to twist the GOT's intentions and accuse them of treason.

15. (C) Looking beyond Turkey, Firat was emphatic that the GOT must be able to talk to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Like it or not, there is a Kurdish administration there and 4-5 million people. Leave aside Kirkuk, he added. Northern Iraq itself is rich in oil and gas which it will exploit and sell. That, too, he implied, can redound to Turkey's benefit. Firat referred as well to the need for Turks to accept their own Kurdish population and turn it to Turkey's advantage. The number of Kurds living in Iran, Iraq and Syria combined, he claimed, is less than the number of Turkish Kurds. Turkey should serve as a "guardian" for the Kurds and take on that mantle even more so than protector of the Iraqi Turcomen.

16. (C) Overall, people in Turkey tend to create red herring problems to mask the real issues, Firat said. One example is the headscarf debate, which the secularists and military use to warn of AKP's alleged Islamist intentions. The real debate should be over the transformation of Turkish society. This transformation has been fueled by a combination of

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democratization, rural-to-urban migration, the education of the former "underclass", and the rise of the Anatolian tigers, enriching and empowering conservative Anatolia. The long-time secularist elites who have presided over numerous coups and four constitutions and have ruled Turkey from the top down for 85 years see this and are scared. They will continue to use whatever tools they can to regain the initiative.

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